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CIA is convenient target

When your back's against the wall, blame the CIA, seems to be a motto of Marxist governments and leftist groups throughout the world.

That is the vein in which to take the Bulgarian government's charge that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency was behind the 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II.

Bulgaria is chafing over the recent arrest of one Bulgarian citizen for complicity in the shooting and the issuance of arrest warrants for two other Bulgarians, both minor diplomats.

While Italian authorities are being close-lipped about the details of the ever-expanding plot to kill the pope, various

published reports have indicated that the Bulgarian secret police planned the attempt. The KGB, the Soviet Union's secret police, also has been implicated.

How credible all this is cannot be determined at this time, but what is clear is that the events unfolding in the summer of 1981, when John Paul was shot, did not give the CIA or any Western intelligence agency grounds to want the pope dead.

The Soviets and Bulgarians, by contrast, had reasons aplenty to be disturbed over the pontiff's public support for the Polish reform movement led by Lech Walesa and the Solidarity union.

If the shooting was a Kremlin conspiracy, it backfired. The pope's only authority is moral authority, and the realization that his words could pose such a threat to secular regimes only lends that much more force to what he has to say.